

# Esther Schipper

**Celeste Rapone**

**Hyperarousal**

May 1 – June 20, 2026

Esther Schipper, Berlin



Celeste Rapone, **Loner**, 2025, oil on linen, 71 x 61 cm (28 x 24 in) (unframed), 73,6 x 63,5 x 5,1 cm (29 x 25 x 2 in) (framed) (CRA 010), Image © Nathan Keay

Esther Schipper Berlin is pleased to announce **Hyperarousal**, Celeste Rapone's first presentation with the gallery. Rapone debuts three paintings that explore the heated juncture of sensuous stimulation and nervous irritation in narratively dense compositions.

With their flattened and compact bodies, the female protagonists of the exhibited paintings allegorize the fraught glamour of millennial angst and the libidinal energies that drive it. Intuitive attention to detail and a witty sense of irony allow Rapone to portray the anxious vibe peculiar to her generation in ambiguous, twisted, and borderline cringe scenes. Caught between agitation and paralysis, the edgy millennials we encounter in her work inhabit a somewhat delicate vulnerability. Here, the theatrical anticipation of doom meets the pleasurable suspension of its arrival. Female vigilance appears captivated between the fear and the enjoyment of potential danger.

Rapone paints *alla prima*, without preliminary drawings. She establishes formal constraints by choosing a color, the figurative elements of each composition remain in check of the hue. While **Waiting** (2025) is suffused with an ice blue palette, **Loner** (2025) draws on shades of moss, olive, and forest green contrasted by the depicted figure's scarlet hair. Beneath the equally red nose, the lonely Whole Foods shopper bites her nails so intensely that it seems she might soon swallow her entire hand.

As her left arm presses against the lower edge of the canvas, the figure in **Waiting** tucks her left breast in the crook of her arm. Both flirtatious and awkward, a displaced floral nipple cover situates the exposed torso in-between assertion and vulnerability. Rapone set the portrait in an idyllic, almost pastoral, *mis-en-scène*. A slim twig frames the figure's head elegantly; a nightingale rests next to a handful of crimson red berries. Yet the naked figure signals the anticipation of imminent danger with a bright green accessory: she carries pepper spray. Yet again, suspended just beside this common tool of self-defense, a digital camera introduces a counterpoint: it bespeaks curiosity and the ability to return the gaze in full flash.

Executed on a large-scale canvas, **Den** (2026) also explores the figuration of vigilant femininity. The surreal and angular perspective collapses the composition into a fictional space marked by narrative ambiguity. Below an industrial ventilation pipe, we glimpse at four intertwined figures dressed in sexy nightgowns. One's manicured hand grabs another's throat; two others hold hands, fingers intertwined. It is impossible to tell these bodies apart. However, the scene's sex appeal is betrayed by the figures' bored facial expressions. Whatever is left of the erotic momentum rubs against a plot twist situated right under the canvas's upper edge. A closer look at the display of an open iPad reveals a paused self-defense video tutorial. As the wrestling women follow the tutorial, they turn the looming shadow of harm into entertainment. Peppering the composition with golf tees and an 8-ball, Rapone makes it a narrative feast, dishing up fun games, twisted limbs, firm flesh, and crammed toes.

**Celeste Rapone** was born in 1985 in New Jersey. Rapone graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2007, and in 2013 she completed an MFA at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago. The artist lives and works in Chicago.

Some of the artist's previous exhibitions and projects include: **Atrium Project**, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago (upcoming); **Celeste Rapone**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2026); **Printemps 2026**, Esther Schipper, Paris (2026); **Presence as a Pause: Interiority and Its Radical Immanence**, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha (2023); **Framing the Female Gaze: Women Artists and the New Historicism**, Lehman College Art Gallery, New York (2023); **Odalisque**, Bunker Art Space, West Palm Beach (2023), and **A Place for Me: Figurative Painting Now**, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2022).

Her work is held in the following collections: Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Speed Art Museum, Louisville; M Woods, Beijing; START Museum, Shanghai, among others.

For press inquiries please contact David Ulrichs. Tel: +49 (0) 176 50 33 01 35 or david@davidulrichs.com.

ESTHER SCHIPPER GMBH  
POTSDAMER STRASSE 81E  
D-10785 BERLIN  
TEL: +49 (0)30 374433133  
OFFICE@ESTHERSCHIPPER.COM  
WWW.ESTHERSCHIPPER.COM